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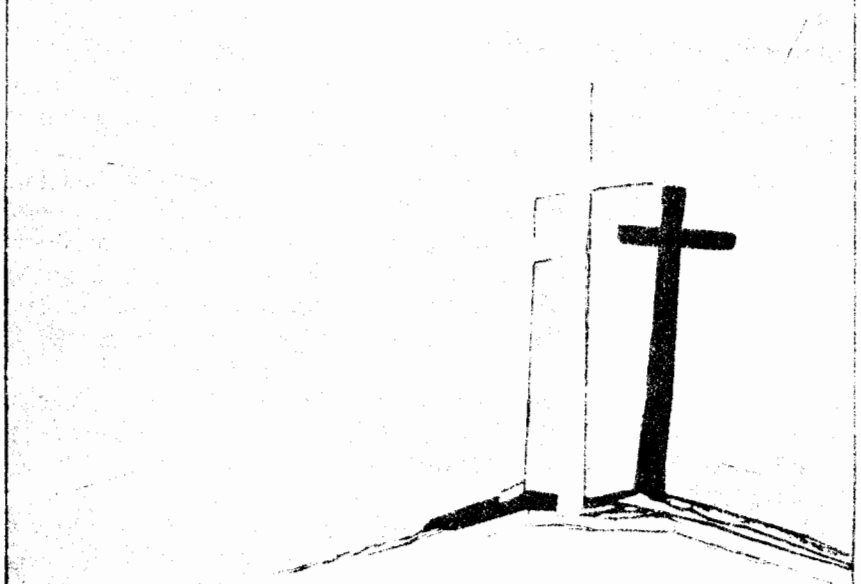

It was during the fiercest dogmatic controversies and the horrors of the 30 Years War that a prophetic voice whispered to future generations the watchword of Christian peacemakers, which was unheeded in a century of intolerance, and forgotten in a century of indifference, but resounds with increased force in a century of revival and reunion.--"In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.--Philip Schaff, Ecc. His., 6, p. 650.

In This Issue:

The Motto That Says It All

Volume 30, No. 2 Leroy Garrett, Editor February, 1988

THE GRACE OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

This would better read The Grace of God in the Old Testament Scriptures, for there is an important difference between the Old Testament (better still, Old *Covenant*) and the Old Testament Scriptures. God made a covenant (that we call "Old" only because it was superseded by the "New") with his special people, the Hebrew nation, at Mt. Sinai. There were of course no Scriptures at this time. The Scriptures grew out of the ensuing experience between God and Isreal. First came the covenant, afterward the Scriptures.

The same is true of the New Testament (better, New *Covenant*), which is a relationship between Christ and his church, sealed by the Holy Spirit through faith and baptism. If the Old Covenant was made with the Jews at Mt. Sinai, the New Covenant was ratified on the day of Pentecost when the church of Jesus Christ became "the new man" or "the new creation." After a generation or so the New Covenant people began to write out of their experiences and eventually there was what we call the "New Testament." So, it was the New Covenant people that produced the New Covenant Scriptures, just as it was the Old Covenant people that produced the Old Covenant Scriptures.

If the Messiah had come shortly after Mt. Sinai, there would never have been what we call the "Old Testament," but there would nevertheless have been the Old Covenant. Or if Jesus had returned within the first generation after Pentecost (as the early Christians thought he would), there would never have been what we call the "New Testament," but there would have been the New Covenant nonetheless. Another way to say it is that the New Testament did not produce the church but the church the New Testament.

This is why we say now and again in this journal that unity and fellowship are not based upon a correct understanding of all the "New Testament," but upon a common relationship to the New

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Covenant. So it is not a matter of being "right" about every point in the "New Testament" that makes fellowship between us possible, but being right in our relationship with Jesus Christ, who is administrator of the New Covenant.

This distinction in no way discredits the place of the Scriptures, either Old or New, but only puts them in proper perspective. It is simply that we need to realize that it wasn't the Bible that produced religion, but religion that produced the Bible. Once produced, it is of course the case that the Bible does much to enhance religious faith.

My thesis for this installment is as follows:

The Old Testament is to be interpreted in the light of the New Testament, particularly in reference to the grace of God as revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One way to say it is that the Old Testament is the gospel in preparation while the New Testament is the gospel in realization. Our people have often said that the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. The Old Testament is meaningful to us as it points to the Cross, however distantly, and as it reveals the God of grace, even if obliquely in comparison to the New Testament. As Christians the Old Testament is meaningful to us only as it in some way and to some degree shows us the grace of (and sometimes the judgment of) God that reaches its ultimate expression in Jesus Christ. This means that we have special interest in the great texts and the mountain peaks of the Old Testament as they anticipate the only thing that really matters, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This means that as we study the Old Testament we are to look for the grace of God, which often shines forth in the more obscure passages as well as the better known ones. A few examples of both:

> Then the Lord said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of his heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done." (Gen. 8:21)

This great (and neglected) text points to the grace of God in an impressive way. The flood is past and the world has supposedly been cleansed of its wicked people. God takes Noah and starts over, but soon humanity is as wretched as before. Even Noah, who is supposedly an example of righteousness, gets drunk and disgraces himself, and instead of accepting the blame he curses his own children for finding him out. Noah is now a farmer and offers sacrifices to God, which was like "soothing aroma" to God. Sinful man worships God and God is pleased! And God assures man that

he has not given up on him. He will not bring another flood, and he will continue to bear with mankind. God's grace!

> I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. (Gen. 12:2)

This is one of the mountain peaks, the call of Abraham, and it reveals that God will take one man and make a nation of him, a nation that will eventually fulfill God's purpose by bringing the Messiah into the world.

> I will set up my dwelling among you, and I will not cast you off. I will live in your midst; I will be your God and you shall be my people. It is I, Yahweh your God, who have brought you out of the land of Egypt so that you should be their servants no longer. I have broken the yoke that bound you and have made you walk with head held high. (Lv. 26:12-13, Jer. Bible)

This shows that even Leviticus, with all its ritual, is rich in the goodness and mercy of God. Lev. 26:41 shows that it is circumcized *hearts* that God wants. The book calls for untainted holiness, offerings that cost something, and a caring brotherhood. In this great passage, which beautifully anticipates the spirit of Christ, a longsuffering God promises to be with his people, deliver them from oppression, and give them such dignity that they can walk with head held high.

> And Yahweh said, "I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers. Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings. I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them out of that land to a land rich and broad, a land where milk and honey flow. And now the cry of the sons of Israel has come to me, and I have witnessed the way the Egyptians oppress them, so come, I send you to Pharaoh to bring the sons of Israel, my people, out of Egypt." (Ex. 3:7-10, Jer. Bible.)

Notice how the God of grace acts for his people: *I have seen, I have heard, I am well aware, I will deliver, I have witnessed,* and at last one of the great lines of the Old Testament, "Come Moses, I send you to Pharaoh." Note too the emphasis on "my people," and the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey.

> God create a clean heart in me, put into me a new and constant spirit, do not banish me from your presence, do not deprise me of your holy spirit. (Ps. 51:10-11, Jer. Bible)

Notice how Yahweh (or *Lord*) is regularly used up to this Psalm, which is the name of God and implies more intimacy. God is what he is, creator and judge as well as savior, and not his name. Now that David has committed a grievous sin he bows before the great judge

of all mankind, who is God. It is remarkable that in this prayer of contrition David believes that God has never left him, that he is still in God's presence, and that the holy spirit (meaning here the presence of God in his life) has not yet left him. This shows there is forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament as well as in the New. This majestic passage is but one of hundreds in the Psalms alone that point up the grace of God, some of which refer to the Messiah himself, such as Ps. 22.

> This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God. (Mic. 6:8, Jer. Bible)

This may well be the most important passage in all the Old Testament because in but few words it shows what religion is all about. To act justly is to do what is right, to love tenderly is to show mercy or lovingkindness, the Hebrew word being the one that refers to God's covenant love, one of the great words of the Bible. To walk humbly refers to how we should reverence God in all that we do.

When we apply our hermeneutical rule to these passages, *look for the grace of God in the Old Testament*, they pass with flying colors. It is the case with hundreds of other references. A good rule is to mark your Bible, underlining the lines in red that inspire you. The more you study and the more good sources you use, such as a devotional commentary, the more marking you will do. Then as you thumb through your Bible time and again you can easily be reminded of your favorite *verses*. It is enriching to commit some of them to memory. This means that we recognize that some things in the Bible are much more meaningful than other things. All truths from God's word are equally true but not equally important.

Our test of subjecting things in the Bible to the principle of God's grace will lead us to reject some things as not edifying to the soul. If we mark some passages in red to note their relevance, we might put a question mark alongside others.

I have a question mark alongside Noah's curse of Canaan in Gen. 9:25, not only because Noah should have accepted the blame for his own sin of drunkenness and not blamed his sons, but also because the curse anticipates such evils as apartheid and racism in today's world more than it does the grace of God that we see in Christ. The curse is there probably because the Canaanites eventually became Israel's enemies. It also points to the exclusivism of the Jews in those days, and so it reminds us of radical Zionism of today, advocated by some Jews and Christians alike, who are willing to "curse" the Arabs, denying them any rights to Palestine, in favor of the Jews. Is there any mercy in that? After all, the Arabs too are sons of Abraham!

If it bothers you to sit in judgment on the Bible like that, I would remind you that we all do it when we select our favorite verses, for we choose some and not others. Moreover, the Bible itself does this sort of thing. The book of Job drones on and on, chapter after chapter, with the speeches of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, and if you are turned off by what they say you have some excellent company, God himself! In Job 42 God rebukes Job's three friends "for not speaking truthfully about me," and he forthwith charges them to repent, offer a sacrifice, and let Job pray for them. God himself rules that upward of one-half of one of the longest books in the Bible is not true.

Indeed, the entire book of Job can be questioned if one is expecting to find the answer as to why the righteous suffer, which it is purported to answer. Unless that answer is: *faith must remain even when understanding fails*, which is its conclusion. But there is little comfort in that answer. Those who are advised to turn to the book of Job for an answer to tragedy and suffering in their lives are ill-advised. I would rather recommend Job to a college class in the philosophy of religion, for it has more philosophy in it than religion.

The value of the book of Job is that it challenges the superficial view of suffering that was held by Jewish orthodoxy at that time, that if one suffers disaster and tragedy it must be because of his sins, and if one is righteous calamity will not befall him. This is the position taken in the "Wisdom Literature" of the Old Testament (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and some Psalms) as well as several books of the Apocrypha, which is part of the Roman Catholic Bible, which creates another problem between the Old Testament and the New.

Psalms 1 assures the righteous man that "whatever he does shall prosper," and Ps. 91 promises "But it will not come near you" when it refers to "terror by night" and "the pestilence that walks in darkness." "A thousand may fall at your side," it assures the righteous, *but not you!* David never saw a righteous man forsaken nor his seed begging bread, according to Ps. 37:25. And one can garner a "health and wealth" gospel from the Proverbs.

But we soon learn in our cruel world that the best of Christians fall in battle, meet with tragedy and calamity, suffer from hunger, pestilence and terrorism, and die of the most dreaded diseases. And they do not always prosper. Jesus assures us that in this world we will suffer hardship, and he promises neither health, wealth, ease or success. But he does say, "But be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33).

So, as we look for God's grace in the Old Testament we will apply question marks as well as underline in red.

Christians should seek their answer to why the righteous suffer in the New Testament where there *is* an answer, three in fact. One

is in Acts 14:22 where we are told that "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." Another answer comes from one who, unlike Job, actually rejoiced in his suffering: "In my flesh I make up for what is lacking in Christ's trials, for the sake of his Body, which is the Church" (Col. 1:25). And the most impressive answer of all, which is a million miles from Job: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Ro. 8:18). The only answer we need is that there is another world where we will suffer no more, and everything will be made right. Amen!

But poor Job, he received no such answer. Even when God at last speaks, not one word is said about Job's wretched condition or his crying need. Not one word of comfort. God zaps him with the likes of: "Job, do you know how mountain goats give birth?," which is hardly what you would expect from a merciful God to one overwhelmed by suffering and doubt. God even invites the poor man to debate! You might say that Job needed to be zapped. So did the prodigal son. There is a vast difference between the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and the God of Job. The God of Job wanted to ask questions; the father of the prodigal son had no questions to ask. He was too busy loving and forgiving.

And that is my point: there is a vast difference between the Old and New Testaments, between law and gospel, between exactitude and mercy. In the New Testament and in Christ we have the greater light, and it is by that light that we evaluate the lesser light. There is light in the Old Testament, and there is love, grace, mercy, and truth. It is like mining for gold. Now and again we come upon an extra large nugget, such as this one, which I make my daily prayer and which C. S. Lewis declared to be the most majestic lines in the English language.

> Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. (Ps. 19:14)

It doesn't take many of those to make you a rich man!—the Editor

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Crowns and thrones may perish,
Kingdoms rise and wane,
But the Church of Jesus,
Constant will remain.

--Sabine Baring-Gould

Most of us take to mottoes and slogans, for they have a way of saying much in few words. Most states within our Union have their mottoes, from Tennessee's bland "Commerce and Agriculture" to Virginia's exotic "Sic Semper Tyrannis" (Thus Ever to Tyrants), which is often accompanied with a picture of a booted foot crushing a serpent. Texas' motto is so tame that even Texans have to be told that it is "Friendship."

Businesses often have theirs. I've always admired "Delta is ready when you are" and "There's a Ford in your future." But none is more creative than "Things go better with Coke," which always reminds me of Ouida. In fact it fits Ouida better than Coke.

I found that a lot of philosophy could be taught to college and high school students alike by way of aphorisms. Once they understand what Socrates meant by "The unexamined life is not worth living" and what Francis Bacon meant by "Knowledge is power," they are off to a good start. Descartes' "I think therefore I am" and Protagoras' "Man is the measure of all things" may be more difficult, but they have a way of summarizing great systems of thought.

Our parents and grandparents always have their maxims, such as "A stitch in time saves nine," "An idle mind is the devil's workshop," and "Pretty is as pretty does." They live on through the generations because they are packed with common sense. Ouida's favorite is Ben Franklin's "Early to bed and early to rise makes one healthy, wealthy, and wise," which doesn't quite apply to her since she doesn't practice it but is still healthy, wealthy, and wise, and a lot more. Franklin also gave us "A penny saved is a penny earned," and somebody also gave us "Penny wise and pound foolish."

Slogans are often stamped on coins and our own nation is unique in that we put two slogans on the same coin E Pluribus Unum means "Out of many, one," which refers to the unity of our nation amidst all its diversity. That we stamp "In God We Trust" on the same coin says more about our national heritage than is apparent in the lives of our people.

That our own forebears in the Stone-Campbell Movement would make substantial use of slogans says something about their practical approach to religion. It was more than a penchant for turning a phrase, for they couched the basic principles of their plea for reformation in a half dozen maxims. It was one of their ways of catching the ears of the masses, **and** it was consistent with the frontier mind which thought not only in simple terms but boldly and individualistically as well. "We are Christians only" might say more than a dozen discourses and "We speak where the Scriptures speak and are silent where the Scriptures are silent" might say more

against the creeds of men than many arguments.

But the slogan that says it all had its origin in the Protestant Reformation and has appeared in different forms. Today we usually say, "In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, love." It first appeared as, In fundamentals, unity; in non-fundamentals, liberty; in all things: charity, which may make the meaning clearer. But its best form may be: In essentials unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity. Considered together they make it clear that we are to be united in areas of faith, fundamentals, and essentials.

I say this slogan says it all because it gives us in capsule form what our heritage as a unity movement is all about. It first of all calls for unity, not conformity. It assumes that unity is both desirable and possible. Moreover, it couples unity with both freedom and love, recognizing that the three values stand together. Unity without freedom is a contradiction, and freedom without love is hardly freedom at all. These three, unity, freedom, and love, are attributes of true religion because they are attributes of God. This slogan joins them in an exciting relationship. Truth in liberty; love in diversity would be another way of putting it, but the old slogan, which reverberated across the Reformation in Europe, says it better.

But this slogan has an eerie paradox associated with it: while we all agree with it we seem unable to practice it. I have not yet met the first person who questions its validity. All agree that we can and should unite upon matters of faith, and we agree that we should allow liberty in matters of opinion. And of course we are of one mind that all things should be done in love. The slogan stands unchallenged and it is accepted by all parties and factions. Where then is the problem?

While we agree that we can unite on matters of faith and allow liberty in matters of opinion, we are unable to agree on what constitutes faith and what constitutes opinion. What is a matter of faith to one is a matter of opinion to another, and what is a matter of opinion to one is a matter of faith to another. This creates an impasse. So, accepting the truth of the axiom is not our problem, for we all accept it, but finding the proper application of it. It appears that if we could satisfy ourselves on what things are in the category of faith and what things are in the category of opinion, we'd be home free.

Our pioneers supposed they had the answer to this, for to them matters of faith are those things clearly and distinctly set forth in scripture, while opinions are unclear and indistinct. Or as Alexander Campbell put it, faith has to do with facts, while opinions are theories drawn from the facts. That God is and that he created the

world are facts, and here there can be unity, but theories about the nature of God and how he created the world are matters of opinion (or deductions), and here we are to allow liberty to differ. The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ are facts, and we can all unite upon such facts, but there are endless opinions, even theological systems, as to what all these facts mean.

Our pioneers were able to implement this slogan better than we do today, and perhaps it was because they had no problem distinguishing between faith and opinion. Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell, in their disagreement over the nature of the preexistence of Christ, are an illustration of this. They agreed on the fact of Scripture that in some way Jesus as the Son of God existed in eternity before he became a man. But Stone claimed that while the Son is one with God it is only in essence for they are separate persons, and so Jesus is to be reverenced as the Son of God but not as God. He thus rejected what is usually meant by the Trinity, which caused him to be associated with the ancient heresy of Arianism. This illustrates how most "heresy" so-called is a matter of theological speculation.

While Campbell was more orthodox on this issue and even considered Stone seriously mistaken, he recognized that the difference was a matter of opinion and never allowed it to affect their friendship or fellowship, which were close. But in the Campbell-Rice debate Mr. Rice took advantage of this disagreement between the two leaders of the Movement, charging that they could not be united when they differed in this way. This led Campbell to explain the difference between faith and opinion and the nature of the unity he sought, which stands as one of his masterpieces.

> Our bond of union is not opinion, nor unity of opinion. It is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Spirit, one hope, one God and Father of all. These we all preach and teach. We have no patented form of sound words drawn up by human art and man's device, to which allmust vow eternal fidelity. It is our peculiar felicity, and perhaps, it may be our honor, too, that we have been able to discover a ground so common, so sacred, so divinely approbated, so perfectly catholic and enduring, on which every man who loves our Lord Jesus Christ sincerely, may unite, and commune, and harmonize, and cooperate in all the works of faith, in all the labors of love, and in all perseverance of hope. (Campbell-Rice Debate, p. 505)

He saw his plea as "perfectly catholic" because it called for a unity based only upon principles that all believers accept, the seven unities of Ephesians 4 (He inadvertently omitted "one body" in the above reference). He often summarized these as "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," naming them as the facts upon which all Christians can unite, even when they differ on opinions about the facts. So he and Stone were united upon the "one Lord" even when they had a different theology about his preexistence. Campbell allowed this so long as the differences were sincere and so long as they were held strictly as opinion and not imposed upon others as a matter of faith.

We should be able to come up with some rules of interpretation in determining what is faith and what is opinion. Here is one: matters concerning which the Scriptures do not speak clearly are matters of opinion. Another might be: matters of faith are based upon facts set forth in Scripture; matters of opinion are what we think those facts mean, or theories drawn from the facts.

Some examples: That the Scriptures are inspired is a fact, a matter of faith; but a theory of how they are inspired is a matter of opinion. Singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is a matter of fact, a matter of faith; but hymnals, tuning forks, instruments, shaped notes, sheet music, solos, choirs, etc. are matters of opinion.

Tongue-speaking in the apostolic church is a fact, a matter of faith; but whether it continues to apply during the centuries and today is a matter of opinion. The kingdom of God is a fact of Scripture, a matter of faith; but as to precisely what it is and how it manifests itself in human history and in God's tomorrow is a matter of opinion.

Distinguishing between faith and opinion may also be done by use of the other terms that have been used in the slogan--essentials and fundamentals. Can we go so far, for instance, as to make acappella singing essential to salvation, and is it fundamental to the Christian faith? Is any single interpretation of the millennium essential to being a Christian? On and on it goes. When we list the things that divide us we can hardly name them as necessary to being a Christian.

But we can all agree with Campbell that the seven ones of Eph. 4, which the apostle Paul himself listed as the basis of unity, are essential and fundamental. But not theories, opinions, and deductions drawn from those fundamentals.

This does not mean that opinions are unimportant. Some of them may be true and crucial to our understanding, but as Thomas Campbell put it in his Declaration and Address: They are not to be imposed upon others as the true doctrine of Christ except as they see the connection. That is the essence of the slogan that says it all: we are free to hold opinions but we are not to be pushy with them.

A revival of commitment to an old motto would go far in reconstituting us as the unity people we were meant to be, however it may

be worded.

In matters of faith or essentials (facts, principles, fundamentals) unity.

In matters of opinion or non-essentials (theories, deductions, methods) liberty.

In all things love or charity. --the Editor

THE PRESBYTERIANS: THE REFORMED PEOPLE OF GOD

(This is the second in a series of reports on my visits to all the churches in my home town of Denton, Texas. These visits have confirmed my conviction that we all have far more in common than we have differences, and that we should emphasize the former rather than the latter. These visits have given me cause to look more deeply into the rich and varied traditions of these churches. Since these visits always follow my attendance at a Church of Christ in an earlier service, it is to be expected that I would make comparisons between these churches and my own. And so the reader will forgive me when these comparisons are reflected in these reports.)

My home town of Denton, Texas might be called "a Baptist town" (The Baptist Church is sometimes said to be our state church!) but hardly " a Presbyterian town." And yet the Presbyterians have a unique presence in this city. There are two Presbyterian denominations represented, the United Presbyterian Church of the United States (three congregations) and a congregation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, which has a history and tradition all its own. The UPC has its regional headquarters here, called The Synod of the Sun, the "Sun" referring to the sunbelt states of Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Arkansas. It conducts the synodal affairs for 1,015 churches. The Cumberland denomination has but one children's home, and it is located in Denton. There is also the Korean Presbyterian Church, which meets in the facilities of the First Presbyterian Church.

I have visited all five of these churches, along with the Synod office and the Cumberland Presbyterian Home. The Korean church made up mostly of Koreans who are students in our two universities,

conducts its service only in Korean, but it was nonetheless a great experience to worship with them. About 40 were present and the preacher was from the Korean Presbyterian Church in Dallas, a lovely Korean woman. I was surprised to learn that there are 300 Korean Presbyterian churches in the United States. The Presbyterians are strong in Korea but badly divided. Even when it is in a foreign tongue a Christian service can be meaningful because of the universal language of love. Too, one recognizes the hymns and finds himself quietly singing along, translating them into his own tongue, which is another instance of how much we have in common. I will inject a proposition at this point: *we ought to be able to have at least some fellowship with all those who sing the same hymns we do.* That reminds me of an ancient Roman description of the early Christians, "They sing hymns to one called Christ." Should there not be some closeness between all those who do that?

Speaking of singing, the First Presbyterian Church in Denton has one of the most inspiring choirs I've ever heard, and its pastor, Jim Lacy, can be counted on to give a meaningful discourse from the Bible. I was also impressed by the Sunday School teacher I heard, supposing him to be an unusually well-educated layman, only to learn that he has been a missionary to South America for 20 years!

The Presbyterian churches impress one as not only friendly, affluent, white, and educated, but also as dedicated and responsible. They'll still be around next year and a decade from now, and it is not all that important who the pastor is. Unlike many "Independent" churches that come and go with the vagaries of some preacher, the Presbyterians are always there and always the same, while pastors come and go. The "Independent" preacher often owns the church or has financial control, or, if need be, he can by hook or crook "steal" the property. That can't happen in a Presbyterian church. A "charismatic" preacher in east Texas tried to "steal" a church, but had to settle for dividing it and going "Independent" in another location. The Presbytery owns the property and it can come in and remove the pastor if the Session (board of elders) is inclined to defend an heretical or immoral pastor. But only the Session can hire the pastor and only the congregation can select the Session. It seems to work well.

My interview with Randy Hammer, pastor of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, revealed remarkable parallels to the history of the Stone-Campbell Movement. "It sounds like the Campbellites!," I told him as he recounted the history of Presbyterian divisions.

His own tiny denomination of 90,703 total members but only 53,000 active members in 811 churches (those honest figures are

impressive in these days of inflated numbers) was not always tiny. Starting about the same time as the Campbellites (1810), on the American frontier the Cumberland church grew somewhat like we did and had 200,000 members by the turn of the century. In 1906 over half of them reunited with the main body of Presbyterians from whom they had earlier separated. Those who chose not to reunite are the Cumberland church today. While they once had numerous educational institutions, they now have but one college, Bethel in Tennessee and one seminary in Memphis.

The founders of the Cumberland church did not intend to start another denomination. Three Presbyterian divines, disenchanted with their churches insistence on an "educated" ministry, indifference toward evangelism, and belief in "double" predestination (some are reprobated to hell while others are predestined for heaven), started a new Presbytery and called it Cumberland, hoping that it could influence the church at large. It grew rapidly and soon had its own Synod, and in time its own General Assembly. And so it became a denomination all its own. That gives you the order of polity in all Presbyterian churches: Session (local ruling elders and pastor) Presbytery (many Sessions represented), Synod (serving Sessions and Presbyteries), the General Assembly (highest governing body, made up of equal number of elders and pastors from the Presbyteries).

The Presbyterians are proud of their polity, believing it to be eminently Biblical, for they are ruled by elders (presbyters, hence their name), not by Bishops and not by the majority in the congregation. And yet they are protected, if need be, from an oppressive local eldership (Session) by a larger number of elders (Presbytery). Practically speaking, however, it is usually the pastor that runs the church, the Session humbly giving its blessings, as is the case in most denominations. But the power structure is there if and when needed.

The Cumberland church is unique in that it has never had enough pastors and there are presently over 100 vacant pulpits.

Like the Cumberland beginnings, our own churches trace their origin to reform-minded Presbyterian ministers who wanted to change things but did not want to start another church. They too created a new Presbytery instead, which they called the Springfield Presbytery. But unlike their Cumberland counterparts, they had such a passion for Christian unity that they resolved to lay to rest the entity they had created, lest it be conceived as sectarian. In their Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery (1804), which lives on as one of our founding documents, they wrote: "Let this Body die

and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large." The unity movement they launched eventually became Christian Churches/ Churches of Christ/Disciples of Christ.

All four of the founding fathers of our Movement were originally Presbyterian ministers: Alexander and Thomas Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and Walter Scott. That is why we sometimes jokingly say, "If our Movement dies out, God can always start over since there are still plenty of Presbyterians." There are yet many Presbyterians even if there are now more Moslems in this country than there are Presbyterians, a fact that I find disturbing. The United Presbyterian Church numbers 3,057,226 in 11,621 congregations. The General Assembly's budget is almost 100 million for 1988, 20 million of which is for social justice and peacemaking.

Not only do Presbyterians loom large in our own church's history, but in the history of our nation as well. Members of Parliament in England sometimes referred to the American Revolution as "the Presbyterian Rebellion," partly because Presbyterians in America were especially anti-British (due to antagonisms between England, where the Anglican was the state church, and Scotland, where the Presbyterian was the state church) but also because Presbyterians were in the forefront of the action. Twelve Presbyterians signed the Declaration of Independence. They were also in the forefront of the great revivals, the First and the Second Great Awakenings. It was the second, led by James McGready, a Presbyterian, that fanned the fires of revivalism in the 1790's that led to the famous Cane Ridge revival in Kentucky in 1802, back to wh'ch we in Churches of Christ trace our beginnings in the person of Barton W. Stone.

In 1984 the Moderator of the General Assembly of the UPC appointed a 21-person committee to help the church recapture and reassert its identity as "the Reformed people of God." We use that term to describe the Presbyterians in this report, realizing that the Reformed faith is the essence of Presbyterianism. In fact the 1988 Mission Yearbook, published by the General Assembly, uses that term as contradistinctive to both Catholic and Protestant, such as: "Present-day Presbyterians can thus draw on the central commitments they share with sisters and brothers in the Catholic, Protestant, and Reformed expressions of the church." While they admit to being Protestants, they are of "the Reformed tradition" within Protestantism, a distinction that is crucial in understanding where they are coming from. But there are many Reformed denominations, most of which belong to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, which trace their beginnings to John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Knox.

The UPC Book of Order names ten doctrines that Presbyterians deem essential, six of which are distinctively "Reformed." The first two of the ten are held in common with all Christians, the mystery of the Trinity and the incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ. Two others are shared by all Protestants: Justification by grace through faith and the Scriptures as the final authority for salvation and the life of faith. The six Reformed doctrines are: (1) God's sovereignty; (2) God's choosing (election) of people for salvation and service; (3) the covenant life of the church, ordering itself according to the Word of God; (4) a faithful stewardship of God's creation; (5) the sin of idolatry is to worship anything created rather than God; (6) the necessity of obedience to the Word of God in working for justice in the transformation of society.

It is noteworthy that these six "essential" marks of the Reformed faith, which has its roots in the theology of John Calvin, have little in common with what has long been known as the "five points" of Calvinism, which are: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and preservation of the saints. These controversial doctrines have not been generally accepted by Christians. The way the UPC now interprets the Reformed faith it is well nigh acceptable to all believers. The oldline Calvinism that taught that some are eternally predestined to go to heaven and others eternally reprobated to hell, and "the number can be neither increased nor diminished" is apparently dead. One Presbyterian minister told me that he didn't know a single Presbyterian that believed that anymore. There is certainly freewill and free choice implied in the six essentials, especially in no. 6. If no. 2 implies predestination, it is stated in a way that is generally acceptable, for it is clear in Scripture that God *does* call or elect us for salvation and service.

We can certainly agree with the way James W. Angell puts it in How To Spell Presbyterian:

> Predestination, often associated with Presbyterian thinking, rather than suggesting a fatalistic "whatever will be will be," is a powerful summons to strive. It does not play down our responsibility for the future, nor imagine it fixed. What it does is set those efforts in a larger context. It says that destiny will be finally settled more by God's love than by our wit.

Should you visit a Presbyterian service, which I strongly recommend, you will be edified by a service of great music, meaningful prayers, and biblically-based teaching. You will agree with what you experience more than you will disagree. And you will meet people who not only talk about unity but have made some effort to practice it. While Presbyterians have divided as much as the rest of us, they have had some success in restoring unity. In 1983 the two major bodies in the U.S.A, divided "North" and "South" during the Civil War, became the United Presbyterian Church of the United States.

Together they produced this statement about the unity of the church universal, which should be proclaimed from every pulpit around the world, including our own.

> There is one church. The unity of the church is a gift of its Lord and finds expression in its faithfulness to the mission to which Christ calls it. The church is a fellowship of believers which seeks the enlargement of the circle of faith to include all people and is never content to enjoy the benefits of Christian community for itself alone.

Did the United Presbyterians say that or was it Alexander Campbell? Or Barton W. Stone? Never mind. Let all the people say, *Amen!*—the Editor

OUR CHANGING WORLD

We regret that the issues of this journal for 1988 have been almost a month late. The transition to a computer for both our mailing list and typesetting has had its problems. Ouida now sets the type, places the articles through the Pagemaker software, runs them off on the printer for proofreading and correction. The disk that holds the entire issue is then taken to a place that runs off the pages on a laser printer, just as you see them. Our printer, who used to do all this, now only photographs the pages, makes plates for his offset press, and runs the issue. But Ouida, who has mostly taught herself on the computer, has had trouble getting the computer to obey her and has had to seek help where she could find it, sometimes from the Apple McIntosh hotline. We were told that "If you can point, you can operate a computer." Don't you believe it! It is still as much a mystery to me as the building of the pyramids.

As part of my mission to visit every church in my home town. I have recently visited the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Black) and the Jehovah's witnesses. Since I had marched on the King holiday with some present at the A.M.E. church, I was warmly received. Since I was not accompanied by a member of the Jehovah's Witness church, my visit at Kingdom Hall was both conspicuous and suspect. "Your coming in here like this is very unusual," one of their elders assured me, but I was graciously received even if a bit intimidated. But when intimidated I stand my ground! It is the first time in all my visits that I have spoken out in an assembly, but it was appropriate since others were. I spoke up so as to praise the name of Jesus Christ since all I was hearing was "Jehovah." They told me after the service in no uncertain terms that they did not worship Jesus but Jehovah God. "His own disciples never worshipped him," they insisted. I agreed that while it may be true that the disciples did not worship Jesus during his lifetime, they did so when he appeared as the risen Lord, as it says in Lk. 24:52. We also talked about whether "Jehovah" is the

name of God. I will be reporting on these visits in my extended series on my church visits.

Elmer and Geneva Prout report in their Tachiba from Japan that the Church of Christ in Ibaraki is in a unity effort with an independent Gospel church. They agreed to share in a year-ending prayer and song service. The preacher for the Church of Christ stated that he believed his people should take the initiative and invite the Gospel church because of the Lord's prayer for unity. Brother Prout also tells of progress in unity efforts between Churches of Christ and Christian Churches, and concludes that these are signs that Japanese believers are taking the Lord's prayer for unity seriously and that they are challenged to ask themselves which is more important, the defense of their logical conclusions or the biblical imperative to "Receive one another as the Lord has received you."

A lot of interest is being shown in the debate on instrumental music that is to be held in Joplin, Mo., April 12-15, between Alan E. Highers of the Church of Christ and Given O. Blakely of the Christian Church. While I know both of these men and believe they will conduct themselves in an exemplary way, I doubt that such debates will bring our people any closer together. Besides, it implies a fallacy, that such differences as instrumental music must be settled before we can be united. If that is the case we will never be united, for even if "the organ question," long debated in our history, should be settled, there will be (and or) other differences, and so the debates would be endless. We can be united only by recognizing that we can have such differences and still love and accept each other. Debating each other has proved counterproductive as our history indicates.

Ouida and I are hopeful of attending the World Convention of Churches of Christ in Auckland, New Zealand, Nov. 2-6. People of our heritage will be there from many parts of the world, thousands of them. It is probably the most diverse gathering of our people, and it assembles every five years. One feature this year will be the Heritage Breakfasts which will celebrate the bicentennial of Alexander Campbell's birth. I will serve as one of the leaders for these sessions. It now appears that I may first visit India where I will address the All India Convention of Churches of Christ and Christian Churches in Kanpur and teach for some two weeks at a Christian school in Kulpahar, Hamirpur. From there I would meet Ouida in New Zealand, who will fly with others from Dallas who will be attending the Convention. This would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for you. If you think it might be for you, a chance to see one of the most beautiful places in the world while attending a great convention, you should write the WCCC headquarters, First City Bank Center, 100 N. Central Expressway, Suite 804, Richardson, Tx. 75080, phone 214/480-0118. There are some attractive travel bargains.

The current issue of Harvard Magazine has an alarming article on "Failing The Aids Test," one that should be read by all concerned Americans and especially leaders in the churches. It asserts that we do not yet perceive the AIDS threat so long as we see the disease as only one of our most critical health problems. Not only is it the most feared and dreaded disease in our lifetime, but its possible devastating consequences could be excelled only by nuclear warfare. The insurance industry is already avoiding insuring those at risk. The article concludes, "If we are truly believers in the brotherhood of man, we must be willing to embrace those whose needs and even existence we have until now barely acknowledged." To do this, it says, we must be willing to reform our existing social systems.

READER'S EXCHANGE

I got out old copies of Bible Talk (1953-54) and read what you once wrote about the rise of the clergy. In one article you told how pagan practices had been "christianized" by the clergy, which included the ceremonial use of candles. Then I read in the January issue of Restoration Review of a kind of candle-mass leading up the advent of Jesus. This comes as no surprise, whether in Denton or elsewhere, for reformers grow tired of fighting and in time adopt practices they once abhorred. And yet it may be that some practices adopted from pagans may be right.—*Darrell Bolin, Lock Haven, Pa.*

(My series on church visits is not to be interpreted as an approval of all the things I tell about, whether a footwashing service at an Adventist church or dancing-in-the-aisles at a Pentecostal church. And that goes for Churches of Christ, including my own. The reports are intended to better acquaint our people with their religious neighbors and to show that we do, after all, have a great deal in common. I have of course changed my mind about some things since 1953, but my misgivings about the clergy system is not one of them.—Ed.)

At Harding College I sat at the feet of J. N. Armstrong, who was as unsectarian as any Church of Christ person I've ever known. He spent a summer at Wheaton College and upon his return to Harding gave a glowing report of the spiritual lives he observed among the faculty and students at Wheaton. In chapel he once introduced a professor from a Methodist college as "Brother so and so." When some students questioned him about this, he told them that they should concern themselves with more important matters than whether a Methodist should be called brother. At that time E. R. Harper was our most prominent preacher in Little Rock, and he took broadsides at brother Armstrong and Harding College.—*W. L. Wilson, El Paso, Tx.*

(One thing I point out in this journal through the years is that we in Churches of Christ have had our magnanimous leaders, lots of them, all the way back to our pioneers; and we have had leaders who were less than magnanimous, lots of them. I urge that we follow the magnanimous ones as they follow Christ.—Ed.)

I appreciate your letter in which you noted that my wife is the hero of my life. Without her I would likely still be wandering in sin. You "picked up on" my past problems with guilt. It continues to be a real problem to me, but as God's grace becomes ever more clear in my mind, I am better able to accept His forgiveness.—Kansas

BOOK NOTES

I have already read several chapters of Cecil Hook's new book, Free As Sons. Great stuff! You can order a copy from him for only $5.95 postpaid at 1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, TX 78130. His other two "Free" titles are $4.95 each, postpaid. These books say things that need saying and say them well and in the right spirit.

The longtime respected The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia in four volumes has been fully revised and republished. It has long been hailed as a remarkable encyclopedia, correct in archaeological and historical detail. It is a veritable goldmine of information. Until May 31 we can offer the set at $149.50 plus postage.

Soon to be published is When Aids Come to Church by William E. Morris, Jr., who is pastor of a church that was invaded by AIDS. This book is not theories about the disease but about how a church prepared itself to respond biblically and compassionately to a problem that may in time come to most every